

THE INCARNATION.

A

S E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE

ORDINATION OF REV. CALVIN S. LOCKE

OVER THE

UNITARIAN CHURCH AND SOCIETY IN WEST DEDHAM,

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1854.

BY

REV. OLIVER STEARNS,

MINISTER OF THE THIRD CHURCH IN HINGHAM.

WITH THE CHARGE, RIGHT HAND OF FELLOWSHIP, AND
ADDRESS TO THE PEOPLE.

BOSTON:

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S E R M O N .

FOR UNTO YOU IS BORN THIS DAY, IN THE CITY OF DAVID, A SAVIOUR,
WHICH IS CHRIST THE LORD. — Luke ii. 11.

THE beautiful prayers and collects of the ancient Church, in all this month of December, point to the Incarnation. They very appropriately, as it seems to me, turn the thoughts of believers to the moment which marks the beginning of the New Dispensation, to the Saviour's birth, to the shepherds watching their flocks by night on the Judæan plains, to the angels choiring peace and good-will, and to the mother bending with new-born interest and inexpressible hope over the unconscious babe. He who took little children in his arms and blessed them, with words which are his eternal benediction to childhood, himself lay a little child in the manger at Bethlehem. In that infant form was inclosed a spirit which should look through the windows of sense as with the eyes of God upon the life it came to exalt and the world it came to redeem, and be the medium of disclosing in its full brightness the Father's grace and truth. In that helpless babe lay wrapped the germ of a love which would infold the race of men in its embrace, and devote its unabused body to the bitter cross for their deliverance from sin. In the wailing child trembled a voice whose articulate speech, the word of God, would be echoed from the most distant ages of future history, and from men's immortal destiny.

I shall attempt to speak of this Incarnation. And I ob-

serve, first, that the ministry of the Holy Spirit by this Incarnation commenced with Jesus's birth. The mother and the child of Bethlehem have become the sacred images of maternity and infancy throughout Christendom. As men in rude times looked upon the picture with a simple faith, albeit mingled with something like adoration, they felt more the dignity of the maternal office, the worth of childhood, and the sacredness of the mystery of a soul's birth in a form of flesh. Wherever the history of redemption is known, it has honored the maternal relation, that Mary bore and nourished the infant Jesus, the Emanuel. It has shed something of a holy radiance upon infancy, that the Christ rested his head as a helpless babe upon a mother's breast. It has made birth a more sacred event, that the Son of God was born of woman. The superstition of ignorant times gathering around his early history, and not yet dispelled, has gone so far as to call Mary the mother of God, to esteem her a divinity, and to address to her petitions for her intercession.

“ So mighty art thou, lady, and so great,
That he, who grace desireth, and comes not
To thee for aidance, fain would have desire,
Fly without wings,”

are words which Dante puts into the mouth of St. Bernard. In renouncing this, we do unwisely, if we throw away, too, all the power of the peculiar circumstances attending the advent of the Messiah to consecrate maternity and childhood in our associations. We need their influence to hallow the advent of souls.

It seems to have been one of the functions of the Redeemer to shed a new light, by his history from his birth to his ascension, upon the origin, uses, relations, and end of human life. All this was wrapped in darkness to most of the world, when his earthly course began. Men were sunk in brutality, notwithstanding all their artificial refinement, as they are now except as the Gospel has lifted them

out of it. They looked upon the child too often as but a toy, a sweet plaything ; at best as but the heir of some earthly riches or honor ; nay, very often, as only fit to be the tool of a conqueror or the serf of a lord. The child was too much regarded as born only of human parents to an animal life. The soul was scarcely recognized as the breath of God. Rarely could the mother anticipate anything exalted for her offspring. Rarely could the child, as his consciousness unfolded, find a cheering or quickening influence in the thoughts of his destiny. Human trial, which Christ turns into an angelic ministry, was a blinding mystery. Human life was degraded. Human relations were dishonored. So they are now where the supernatural light has not beamed. So they are now where Christ is despised and rejected. It was one of his functions, in delivering us from sin and the power of the senses, to rid human life and its prominent stages and experiences from trivial and debasing associations. At Cana he owned the divine bond of the wedded pair, by his presence and his gift. Man's probation he hallowed by meeting and conquering temptation at the threshold of full manhood. To the mystery of human trial, his sorrows, revealing the divine heart, and his own perfection, gave the only solution. He consecrated human tears at the grave of Lazarus. He hallowed human agony in Gethsemane. On the cross he was crucified to the world, as we must be to pass the gate of the divine kingdom ; and taught us to conquer fear and false shame ; and showed us how the Father lavished the divine wealth of mercy, while we were yet sinners, to forestall the prodigal's return. So I think the miracle of his introduction into the world was designed in part to give to the sceptical or grovelling minds of men higher suggestions respecting all human origin. It was, perhaps, needed, to lift men's thoughts directly to the Creator ; to teach that, as his unsullied soul was the direct creation of the Divine Spirit, and thus fitted to be the instrument of the Divine Word, to express God, so all souls

are divine offspring, breathings of the effluent spirit, even if corrupted by descending through ancestral channels ; that all are impressed with the Divine image, however worn dim with the streams of human offence. The Beloved of the Father, born of woman, lying an infant in the manger at Bethlehem, suggests a divine origin for every soul, of whatever parentage. Through the influence of the Divine mind and heart addressing human minds and hearts, by the life and word of that holy child Jesus, believers see the immortal destiny begun with the advent of every spirit in an earthly body ; and kind men and women pick up neglected boys and girls in the filthy lanes of corrupt modern American cities as lost kindred of the infant Jesus, that need to be taken to the welcome and the holy nurture of a Christian home. The Redeemer's salvation was to belt the globe, — and that light in the East, followed by some true worshippers of God and martyrs of the Crucified, has crossed the sky to the Western dome ; and now, in a world which the wise men never dreamed of, the little pauper immigrant, or the ragged street runner, or the babe in a slave-cot, equally with the infant cradled in ease and lapped in luxury, is to many hearts a brother or sister of the Christ-child.

The Incarnation has consecrated human birth. Every child springs from a divine lineage ; it is not only a son or daughter of Adam, but of God. It has the impress of the Father, which, however overlaid it may seem, can be renewed and made distinct. It has the essential human faculties, the one original constitution which makes a human soul, by whatever peculiarities modified in the individual. This is a capacity to become the servant of the Most High. This makes it a subject for Christian nurture and for divine grace. This makes it capable of redemption from the tendencies and forces hostile to its integrity. The Christian child is born within the bosom of Christian beliefs and sanctities. It comes to pass through some or all stages of this life as preparatory to another. It comes to

take life's events and relations as a ministry of God. It comes to meet tempters, to love, to rejoice, to weep, and if it grow up a disciple of the Crucified, to take up the cross, to conquer self, and to ascend at last into a higher being. It is born to be instructed in God's providence, and to grow in the knowledge of human and divine things. It is born to teachers and guides refined by holiness, schooled in the faith to hallow as they tempt forth its soul, and to minister to it as unto an heir of salvation. It is born to all which is symbolized by baptism. It comes to be baptized into those influences of the effluent spirit, which, as water flows in all countries, flow in the vicinity of every soul. It comes to have its plastic nature bathed, penetrated through religious education with that remoulding and corrective life from God, which dwelt in Jesus, which dwells in every society of redeemed souls; and thus to be led, reconciled and happy, to the bosom of its Father's love. This is the significance of human birth under the Christian dispensation, and Christ's birth may teach it still.

The birth of a soul in the corporeal form and life, amidst means of grace and religious opportunities, is the prelude to the spirit's birth into an inward life of holiness. It is the vestibule to the religious life, which is hid with Christ in God. Yet it is only the portal; it is not the very birth in the spirit of holy principles and affections; that comes we know not how nor whence, except that it must come from the fountain of original energy. We are not to confound occasions with the Omnipresent Spirit which works by them. Using opportunities, we are yet not to ascribe to human agencies that which is wrought by the Divine power. Train the child in the nurture of the Lord, but remember that its spirit cannot be redeemed from the besetting presence of evil, and born to holiness, without the inspiration of the Almighty breathing through its nature; and pray for that to work through your agency.

Christ's supernatural advent instructs us to look above nature for the coming of spirit in nature, and to see God in the spiritual as well as in the natural birth. The holiest leadings and most blessed exercises of our souls, intelligible in experience, are mysterious in their causation, and we can rest only in the thought that all good desires do proceed from the Central and Underived Being; and the ripe saint who has done most with opportunities, and put to best uses nature and life, will bend with awe and humility before an inward Redeemer, and say with Paul, "By the grace of God I am what I am."

II. The course of our meditation has brought us to the great fact of redemption, the birth of Christ in consciousness and the soul. There follows necessarily the regeneration of humanity, the coming of Christ's spirit in society, in human laws, ideas, usages, and institutions. But first in order is the birth of the Redeemer in the individual soul. "Unto you is born a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." This Saviour must be in us, generating a life opposed to the life of self. He must be the inward Lord and Sovereign of our affections and desires. As at Bethlehem the Divine word came in a shape of flesh, and was manifest through infancy, childhood, and adult life, the Christ who lay there a weak babe achieving a ministry which has become the mightiest power to cleanse and deliver the human race from its corruptions; so must that Divine word come in us too, it may be at first in some faint desire after better things, in some resolution partially kept, that with Divine help we will deny self, but growing to the mastership over body and mind, until we live the lives we live in the flesh by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us. This is the great fact of redemption. This meets the deep, central, indestructible want of the soul. As soon as it becomes in some degree conscious of its spiritual relations, the soul finds itself in spiritual helplessness. The deepest religious experience is

marked at some time by a profound sense of deficiency. The Divine will has not been done. The Divine law utters its condemnation of us. Abuse has crept into our being. A life of self lies hidden at its centre, as a power of sin holding us at its mercy, and balking our better aspirations. Natural inclinations, grown tyrannous, may have intrenched themselves as hurtful passions and lusts in our souls. The evil spirit of the world may have passed into us. The evil spirit of those who lived before us may reappear in us. The moment the holiness of God and the Divine requirement shine in upon the soul in full radiance, sin, seen to be a fearful tendency, is felt to be our chief enemy, — our only danger and misery. How it came we may not know. But its power is felt. It seems to beset us behind and before. When this conviction of sinful tendency and spiritual weakness is wrought in the soul, to be delivered from it is the greatest joy. Human nature, arrived at this stage of the consciousness of its relation to the spiritual order of the universe, craves a more than human help. It wants more than human wisdom, affection, or pity can do for it. It wants harmony with its own highest law written upon itself. It wants reconciliation with offended holiness. It wants atonement between itself and the spotless rectitude. It wants express tokens of interest in its struggle and destiny from the spiritual realm. It wants a lifting up of its affections, a revival and elevation of its hope, a sanctification of its motives, all lending a new moral power to the will. It turns to conscience, and conscience cries, One thing thou lackest. It turns to the natural creation: *that* is beautiful; but its beauty does not meet this deepest need; its order chills the spirit longing for Divine pity. That order feeds and protects, but sometimes it famishes and destroys. It is inexorable law. Wisdom and mercy, we may come to trust as Christian believers, are its rule. But to us in its natural aspect it is inexorable law. It goes

on with its ceaseless and mighty retributions. Its wheels never turn out of the eternal ruts. It sheds bounty and scatters flowers; but it crushes us at last bodily in its fingers, as the moth perishes in the blaze of your evening light. In his longing for approach to the Infinite, man turns to nature's grandest displays of power. I wander by the beach, and listen to the ocean's solemn and majestic hymn, which it poured into the Indian's ear, and which now periodically lulls the drudges of civilized cares into an oblivion of the artificial and conventional. The surges with their everlasting roar do not tell of pity. Its gurgling, swallowing waters tell of destruction as much as of life. They do not whisper of immortality, until Christ, dwelling in and filling the soul's intuitions, lends a softer under-tone of hope to its everlasting rhythm. Before this emblem of power, man, bowed by the consciousness of weakness and sin, if he could turn nowhere else, might stand in prayer, in almost the cry of despair, "Speak, Almighty Power! in some accents of compassion. Break through this dread order, and say if thou lovest my soul. Declare thyself mercy as well as law. Solve for me this mystery in which I am encompassed. Tell me of forgiveness and eternal life and help for my spiritual conflicts." And that cry from the depths of the want like no other, and of an anguish like no other, that of a weak and wounded spirit, has been answered on the shores of the Galilæan lake, by the voice which broke upon its storm, the voice of the Father in him who walked upon its waves, "It is I, be not afraid." I am with you always, the Paternal Spirit, in and above the natural order, adjusting your discipline, cognizant of your trials, and instantly present to your prayer. The Almighty has broken through the natural order to reveal the spiritual order. While we were yet sinners, that cry of the soul's great want had been already answered; for Christ had been born and had fulfilled his ministry; his story had been written in light in the world's history; mercy had anticipated the crisis of the soul. It

was answered by the word incarnate in Jesus, at Bethlehem and Bethany, and at Olivet and Calvary. It is answered now, by Christ born in the regenerated soul, dwelling in the heart by faith, its purifier, its forgiver, its Comforter, the life of its holiest affections, its assurer of immortality, the indwelling pledge and fulness of the Father's power and love.

III. As the fact of redemption first in order is Christ spiritually united with the individual believer, so the fact consequent upon it is Christ dwelling in many united in him. The Word first has form in the single disciple, and then it takes form in worship, laws, and social life. All advance in the social spirit and condition of man is the embodiment of Christ in social institutions and dealings, the incarnation of the Divine Word in mankind. A perfect Christian society or state would be the realization on earth of one of the grandest thoughts of God. It would announce and show, as the soul of its operations, the law of regarding others' rights and interests equally with one's own; and as the genuine faith pervading it, that he is greatest who is of most service. Such a state would be a temple in which the citizen might gratefully worship, — a God's house in which the child, as his powers unfolded, would see the Divine attributes, not through a medium obscuring the Father's glory, but in Christ, its brightness shining through windows opening at all points to heaven. From the ascension till now, men have looked for a form of social life, which should be the Shekinah assuring them of marching under the leadership of Jehovah. And in a time of universal ferment and undefined expectation like ours, many share the impatience of the first disciples, and ask if the Lord will now descend, and the reign of truth and righteousness come with some decisive transforming stroke upon the kingdoms of the world. And the answer of Jesus has been ever, "Ask not of times, but watch for the duties which the Spirit shall disclose, and do them in their order, and power shall go with you." *There* is the

sole power for the social regeneration of man, in the Lord Christ descending into upward-looking souls. I say not that one civil constitution is as good as another ; but evil will creep in under any constitution, if Christ be cast out from those who under it constitute a state. Representative legislatures and elective magistrates will not enact and execute justice, if Christ be not in the heart of the people. Liberty, equality, and fraternity, the watchwords of the people, mean no good, out of Christ ; for liberty is but animal passion at large, equality but the equal chance of brutes in confused scramble, and fraternity but the association of robber bands. Christ renewing men reforms society. The Church — the invisible Church — must keep or deliver the State. Not that any formal union of Church and State is expedient. But Church and State are always vitally united, — the heart and arm of one organizing life ; and the limb will wither as soon as it ceases to throb with pulses thrown into its arteries from the centre of a vitality replenished from God.

The call of the Gospel to each soul must ever be, Repent, live anew, live to-day, with a new devotion of all thy being to God, the same now as when the Baptizer sent it forth on the breeze of the Jordan ; but there has been going on since a regeneration of man, to which every one spiritually born has contributed his strength. And yet to this regeneration the perfect spirit-birth of all who live in any community or time is not essential. Long before the evil which supports a wrong is eradicated from every individual of a society, that wrong will disappear, because a sufficient part will refuse longer to uphold it. How soon that sufficient number, spiritually severed from the wrong, will exist, we know not ; it is one of the times known only to the Father, but which may always be hoped for. We know that when life in a sufficient number is withdrawn from an evil doctrine, custom, or institution, it must die. Those who separate themselves from it, being on truth's side, have a weight disproportioned to their numbers. Each is a

power working with and worked by God. They mould opinion, feeling, taste, even where they do not change the heart. This is moral civilization. He who, begotten of God, was born a Saviour into our human life, is its efficient cause; the deliverer from evil, bruising in the most vital part the serpent coiling around the form of humanity.

IV. The incarnation of a Divine Word to communicate large measures of the Holy Spirit to the human family, was a demonstration of supernatural grace. It stands in the centre of all the Divine Providence, and stands out from it, supernatural in its method, and special in its intent. It was costly to the Divine mind and heart. It involved necessarily a sacrifice of the Mediator; and this involved a sacrifice on the part of the Father, of whom he was the voice and image. In the fact of that sacrifice resides the chief power to convince the world of sin, and to prepare man's heart for the renewing contact of the Divine Spirit. It was not substituted punishment. It was sacrifice inevitably incident to a Divine mediatorship. It was essential to God's expression of himself, to bringing on earth the Gospel of truth and forgiveness. The person who should institute this redemption by a life on earth must unite in himself, perfectly, the Divine and the human. The Father must dwell in him; how, we know not; but it is a rational conception that the Father should dwell in him, so that he and the Father should be one in the impression made on man; so that his word and act should be his own, and yet should exactly express God, and as fully as God can be expressed to finite apprehension. He must also be truly human, in human form and with susceptibility to human feeling. The Divine fulness in him must make him, not more impassive, but more alive to the proper impressions of things. It must be an inlet of vast joy. It must be an inlet of vast suffering. This was the fact. The marvel of the evangels is the blending in him of the supernatural and the human with a perfection

of which the prototype must have been a real person ; and which puts the question of the mythical origin of what is peculiar to them almost out of the pale of argument ; for the conception of it seems impossible to any mind but that which conceived it before the world was. A sinless man, who, let me ask, would suffer from proximity to human sin and collision with it, like him whose immaculate nature reached into the depths of the indwelling Father ? In the form of God, he could not jealously assert his Divine dignity, nor selfishly claim any exemption from the stroke of evil ; he must rather, as it were, empty himself of divinity, that the suffering of a genuinely human condition might come in upon him. He wielded a Divine power over nature and man ; yet at Cana he would perform his first miracle with no alacrity, but with reluctance, resisting a mother's importunity, unwilling to hasten the hour when that mother with pierced soul should stand in the shadow of the redeeming cross. And at Bethany he wrought his last and greatest miracle, forecasting the hour it expedited, — wrought it in no elation of mind, but in the spirit of sacrifice, and in such sadness of soul that a few words of appeal to his affections and his help caused him to groan and weep. The fulness of God in him made more vast and deep his longing for holy, human sympathy ; yet he stood at that grave of Lazarus in lonely grandeur, too high for any but the Almighty to reach, and too deep for any but infinite love to fathom ; and in his conscious want of sympathy, there rushed in upon him a feeling of the trials and darkness of man such as never had come into any breast. He who should bring a redeeming power down to mankind, — who should become man's hope, his object of contemplation, his standard of truth, his leader for all generations, the trust of his weak heart, and its uplifter to a forgiving God, — must be on the one side a representative of human life victorious and pure, and on the other the representative of God to men,

— Son of Man, and Son of God, a special and beautiful creation. Through his celestial spirit and his divine insight he must be capable of unfathomable suffering, and sink in Gethsemane under an agony which has amazed the world with its mystery. Should God decree that incarnation? Should God expose an immaculate soul, his beloved Son, to the stroke of evil?

The tone of the introduction of the Gospels, the tone of amazing expectation, and of wonder at the Divine grace, as if the destiny of our race hung upon that moment, is a fit prelude to the sequel. “Unto you is born this day a Saviour.” It *was* a crisis in man’s history. There was need of a being who, under the forms of a human presence and condition, should manifest God, — who should draw men’s minds to himself with a new veneration, and give them higher thoughts of Divine pity and Divine purity. There was need of interposition, as we express it. Not that a point of time had arrived in history unforeseen by Divine prescience, an emergency to be suddenly provided for. Not that the order of the universe so far had failed, and something originally forgotten must be appended as supplementary. The provision for the crisis was a part of the eternal order. It was the predestined complement of the creation up to that point. We may call the fulfilment of this provision an interposition, to give it a proper relief on the plane of Divine operations, to express the speciality of the Divine purpose in adapting it to its place in the Divine order. Why God chose to create a race with spiritual faculties, yet to grope so long in a dim apprehension of their objects, and at length to reveal those objects fully in one person, — why He so slowly pushes this lamp of truth into the dense pagan darkness, — is one of the secrets of his incommunicable being. But the actual method of the Divine procedure we see and know. It is unfolded in the history of the world, which may be looked at as the history of God’s thought. That procedure and that thought

we think and speak of in human modes of conception and in forms of human language. God has addressed, in history, and especially in Christ, our human modes of thinking and feeling, to convey to us some portion of his thought and character which is otherwise incommunicable. And as we humanly apprehend the matter, there was need of interposition, of a way in which Divine love should make itself more felt in sinful human hearts, and of a life adequate to represent Divine truth to man. That love and that truth must be embodied in the purest person. And that person must fall a victim to human cruelty. For Divine truth could not be incarnated on the stage of human action without coming into conflict with sin. That conflict was indispensable, also, because the Divine mercy or spirit of sacrifice in God, to be imaged to all the generations of men in that person's love, could find such expression as the case needed only by meeting contumely and death at the hands of the Spirit of Evil. Should such a person be sent? Thus we may humanly represent the matter as a question of the Divine mind to itself. And in the eternal thought there was no other way of communication between the wandering child and the Father's feeling. This way God chose, because it alone satisfied his perfection. Thus, we may say, Christ alone satisfied God's hatred of sin, and his holy nature; Christ alone expressed the yearning of the Divine heart. God *spared* not his beloved Son. This is a form of human speech and human conception. But it states a fact in providence and history, and a fact which is a standing revelation of something — the spirit of sacrifice — in the Divine character, incommunicable in all other modes.

There was a crisis in the history of our race at Jesus's birth. Man had not the sufficient, all-reconciling truth, and he could not work his way to it alone. The "word made flesh" was the demonstration of that truth; Christ crucified was the price of it. I see little danger of exaggerat-

ing the world's debt to the Gospel as a medium of religious truth. We can scarcely imagine that debt. It is very difficult to conceive of ourselves as so destitute in this respect as were our ancestors in Britain and on the continent of Europe at the introduction of Christianity among them; or, to take a different case, as destitute as were the contemporaries of Tacitus and Cicero, in the palmy period of Roman culture. It is easier to see how unworthy we are of this light of the world, than to show what would be our condition now without the Incarnation and its fruits. I see no probability that natural and moral science would have given us the essential truth. Even if natural science could have taught the people the unity of the creative power, it alone could not have taught a spiritual Providence, nor made the belief of immortality an elevated and efficient conviction. And moral science would not have kept pace with natural; for it had not the requisite facts. The natural world is a perfect embodiment of the laws of natural science, and stimulates and guides the faculties adapted to know them. But human life was not an embodiment of the Divine truth. No life, until Jesus lived and suffered, offered a perfect object to man's spiritual faculties. In ancient literature there is no recorded sentiment, no strain of conversation, which rises to the level of the Evangelist's doctrine of a spiritual Father, or Paul's bold lyric announcement of the resurrection. Why was it? Because Christ embodied these truths in himself, and brought them to man's spiritual perception. If that accomplished Roman who in the midst of public affairs found time for philosophy had sat with the band around the paschal board, and had asked, "Show us the Father, — tell us whither thou goest," Christ could have answered him only as he answered Philip and Thomas, "I am the way," — "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." And if Cicero had communed with Jesus personally in his ministry, had seen him suffer on the cross, and then had

pondered the words and deeds of that One, and by the touch of that spiritual power his intuitional faculties had been waked, a new object would have been presented to his thought and love; Christ would have stood forth to his anointed vision a representation of Infinite Holiness and Love; and that new object would have shed on every relation and act, and on the issues of things, a light for which he longed. Conviction of sin would have crucified vanity. Love would have widened into more than Roman patriotism. Humanity would have superseded glory. Loose thoughts of providential powers would have concentrated into the burning thought of God as a benign and holy Father, and of himself as a child sustaining through love and duty a relation to that Father, of which only eternity could fulfil the obligations and hopes. Thus the mortal gulf would have been spanned by a spiritual arch, and the unseen Divine hand felt extended for him to grasp and hold by as he walked through the shadow of death.

It was not Jesus's speech only which taught man Divine truth, not his outward miracles alone which proved it, not his resurrection alone, but all together, all that he was. The life and sacrifice which he wrought through a human body lifted the Divine character and human destiny into the world's view. They made this character, this destiny objective, and thus informing and quickening to man. They still do this. And it is the office of the Church and the ministry to give prolonged effect to this mediation; to repeat in ritual and in speech this voice of Jesus out of the Divine heart, beseeching the sinner to be reconciled to God. Therefore neither mountain nor ocean, no aspect of nature,—no crystal palace or monumental pile, or victorious battle-field, or eloquence in high debate at the organizing of a nation's life,—no work, act, or art of man,—is the token of anything so grand and affecting as that of which the lowliest Christian temple is the symbol. It stands in the busy street where men are hurrying to and fro on the errands of

human interest, amidst clustering homes where birth and death come, and sin and change are felt, to remind them of a God to be hoped in, and a mercy to be prayed and hoped for. There is no work which reaches to the height and depth of the preacher's, — that of him who is an ambassador to men in Christ's stead. Such an ambassador we ordain to-day. He is to be the tongue of the Incarnation, the medium by whom the Comforter will come and bring earth's child and heaven's Father together. If he have felt the proper power of the Word made flesh, that power will go out on his word ; for the Son of God will be with such preachers until time shall be no more. Let him never attempt to reduce the Gospel to a mere result of the operation of natural laws. Let him preach the supernatural grace. Let him preach Christ, with whom the Father was one.

And let him preach, and let others reverently hear, of the Christ who was not ashamed to call men his brethren. Our subject suggests one or two thoughts of general admonition. Honor all men for Christ's sake. Honor man, in however darkened or fallen a condition, for the sake of him who being in the form of God came in the form and condition of man. Honor every being who wears that human form which Christ wore. Its glory may be eclipsed by the brutalizing effect of sin ; its power of expression may be unillumined, lost under a rayless and torpid spirit ; its shape may be bowed by hardship and oppression ; but honor it as human ; honor it as capable of being transformed by an awakened and redeemed soul ; honor it as of the same human type with the body which Jesus glorified with obedience and suffering, and through which he represented the merciful Father to earth's child. It stamps its possessor as human, as born with the germs of spiritual capacity, as a subject for redeeming love. The Gospel is the pledge of man's emancipation from legalized despotism and abuse, by showing that all who wear the human

form are brethren of the Mediator, the man Christ Jesus. While some students of the Scriptures have sought to lend to the doctrine of property in man the sanction of the supernatural Word, some students of Nature pretend to show her stamp of chattelhood on the form of certain varieties or races of the human family. Let the question come. But remember, it is no question about varieties of race, neither is it a question about the strict unity of human parentage. It is a question about what is human. A brute we cannot punish for human crimes. We cannot demand of him human duties, nor pray for the forgiveness of sin for a chattel, existing for the will, profit, and servile pleasure of a human owner. In spite of cavils, there is a human form. And whoever wears it can be no subject of ownership; he is capable of redemption and sanctification; and corresponding to human duties he may demand unimpaired human relations. Meanwhile, in the discussion, let the Church be careful what doctrine she countenances. It is as great a heresy to deny Christ's humanity and its consequences, as to deny his Divinity and its consequences. The denial of the first makes the last a nullity. It is putting the Son of God on the slave-cross again. The mediatorship has two parts. The redemption, the disenthralment, the elevation of every variety and grade of human beings, is involved in the just honor of God's dear Son.

Again, honor woman for Christ's sake, who was born of woman, that you may be led to honor her fitly for her own sake. Honor the maternal office. For the sake of Mary, the mother of the Redeemer, let the mother's appeal be eternally sacred to man. And ye, who are happy to-day in the joy of gratified affections, think of all the domestic happiness you owe to Mary's Son. Repay the obligation by seeking to honor, to elevate in real dignity, your own sex. Keep your ear ever open to the wife's and mother's wrongs. Besiege the sterner sex, beseech Heaven for the reform or destruction of all laws, customs,

doctrines, tyrannies, oppressions, under whatever name, in your own land or other lands, which dishonor sacred relations, which despoil the mother of the best part of her trust and joy. It is a wife's and mother's and sister's voice which has sent its plea against the violation of the most sacred rights into so many kindreds and tongues of humanity. It was the remonstrance of woman's heart against cruelties heaped upon her sisters as well as upon man. Honor to genius doubly consecrated by the spirit of Mary's Son and by the spirit of Mary's maternity. Yes, honor woman. But rebuke for those who dishonor her. For him who denies her the best culture of her powers, who contemns her peculiar offices, relations, and graces; for him who thinks woman made only for dalliance and a toy; for him who puts on airs, and hopes to atone for his want of manliness by ridiculing his sister's sisters; for the worldling whose heart, withered in the arid atmosphere of policy and calculation, feels nothing for her wrongs, — the Incarnation has no blessing. He is a shame to his race. He is a living, walking insult to him who was born of woman at Bethlehem.

Honor the child for the Christ-child's sake. Honor it by Christian culture, by tempting forth its spirit to Christian deeds and aspiration. Honor childhood in rags and ignorance, for the jewel which the rough casket incloses. Honor the neglected child, the child with perverse habits, the profane little boy, the rude little girl; respect their better nature, and teach them to respect it in their words and actions.

Finally, in these and all ways honor the Redeemer himself. Honor him by professing him before men, and by standing fast through every conflict in defence of his truth and his divine principles. Honor him by laying down your unbelief and sin at the foot of his cross of love. It is not a human voice only that calls you to be reconciled to God; it is the Holy Spirit's voice, it is the call of the Father through the Incarnate Word. See that ye despise not him that speaketh.

C H A R G E.

BY REV. DR. LAMSON, OF DEDHAM.

IN performing the service assigned me on this afternoon of a short winter's day, my brother, I feel that I must be brief. I shall not ask you to accompany me through the whole circle of your duties and responsibilities as preacher and pastor. I have a right to presume that they have been deeply meditated upon by you, and that, as you stand at this altar to-day, to take on you the work of the ministry here, the most earnest wish and prayer of your heart is that you may be found faithful. It is a solemn season with you, — a solemn event, — this beginning of the ministry. May the God of all wisdom and peace guide and keep you to the end.

To the many grave precepts and counsels contained in St. Paul's Epistles to Timothy and Titus, in their spirit still applicable, I need barely refer. You will, I trust, from time to time, make them the subject of thoughtful attention.

The relations of the ministry have become somewhat changed of late years, and to discharge its duties acceptably, and meet the exigencies of the times, requires wisdom and a devoted heart. The latter will do much, though not everything. It is indispensable, however, to an effective ministry. I would say to you, then, in the first place, Give your whole soul to your work! Devote yourself to it heart and hand. Give to it your best thoughts, your diligence, your prayers. Let your ministry be an earnest one. This, its great end and the spirit of the age alike exact. A ministry that is not earnest must be a feeble ministry. See, then, that you enter on your work with a full heart, in singleness of purpose, and a deep love of souls. Propose to yourself a high aim; cherish

an exalted conception of the nature of the trust committed to you as a Christian minister, and resolve to discharge it in all honesty and truthfulness, with affectionateness and zeal, and in an untiring spirit. In your words and acts, in all you do, let there be life, spirit, energy, power. Be fervent. Feel the greatness of your work, the worth of souls, and the transcendent value of Christ's Gospel of reconciliation, and be true to yourself, and the blessing of Heaven will be with you.

The times demand much of the pulpit, and he that would have a successful ministry must not think lightly of a preparation for its duties. His sermons must give evidence of thought and care. He must put life and substance, muscle and sinew, into them. His great work, that which most tasks his faculties, surely, is in the pulpit. The "pulpit is his throne." There he must make his power felt, or it will not long be felt anywhere. From that he must send the arrow home to the conscience of his hearers ; from that mould the convictions and sway the hearts of the people. Whatever be the merits of a minister in other respects, no congregation, in these days certainly, will long remain satisfied, if the pulpit fail of its duty. People will overlook or excuse anything, almost, sooner than "stale, flat, and unprofitable" sermons, or mere frothy harangues. A man may be assiduous elsewhere, may be open, free, sympathizing, and conscientious, but if he give chaff for wheat in the pulpit, he will himself soon be driven away as chaff before the wind.

I do not allude to the unfaithfulness or unskilfulness of the pulpit as though it were a crying sin of our times. The only matter of surprise is, that, with all the demands which, in this age and country, are made on the minister from without, — the amount of which no one but himself knows, — he can from week to week take into the pulpit sermons containing so much evidence of power, so much freshness of thought, and so much variety. But remarks are sometimes heard, to which a young man should be cautious in listening, intimating that, if a preacher perform well certain other duties, the people will pardon some feebleness, or want of careful preparation, in his pulpit ministrations. It may be so for a time ; but the experiment is always hazardous, and in the end usually fails. Look at the cases of a short or unsuccessful

ministry. You will find, after all, that the objections, not in all instances, but most frequently, urged or felt, are want of life, interest, power, wisdom, or soundness in the pulpit. It is defective, bad, or unedifying preaching.

I would not be understood to say, that I think the views entertained of preaching, at least often practically acted upon, at the present day, in all respects sound and just. Too many come to church, not to worship, but to listen to splendid oratory; and they go away to criticize, admire, or condemn, much as they would from the lecture-room, the theatre, or any place of professed entertainment. This error we would see corrected. I would have it felt, that the church is a place of worship, — a place to be visited in a religious spirit, and for a religious end, and not for the sake of an intellectual feast. The want of this spirit it is which often lays a heavy burden on the preacher, and causes him to enter his pulpit with a sinking heart. Strive, then, to make your people religious, in the strict sense of the term. Encourage in them right views of the office of the church and pulpit, and endeavor, by “sound speech that cannot be condemned,” to produce in them Christian seriousness. Accomplish this, and though your task of preparation for the pulpit will still be no light one, though it will require meditation, thought, study, as well as an earnest and right spirit, your deadliest foe will have been vanquished.

The selection of topics to be treated in the discourses of Sunday may well be supposed to be attended with some embarrassment in these times. I would not have the pulpit polemic. Its main business is with personal religion, with sin and holiness. Yet there are questions from time to time coming up in the theological world, on which the preacher, if he is faithful, must have something to say. Some reference to them, direct or indirect, can hardly be avoided. We build on the “foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.” He will, therefore, occupy a prominent place in all Christian preaching, as the Christ both of history and of consciousness. You will preach Christ crucified and risen, the Sent of God, the Saviour of souls. The Christian rites, in their emblematic significance and hallowed uses, you will urge on the attention, and endeavor to put life into them.

In reference to the reformatory movements and great agitating questions of the day, the pulpit most certainly has a duty to perform, and a very solemn one too, and in some respects difficult. Whatever course it pursues, it cannot hope to escape censure. One and another has his *pet* idea, or *pet* reform or measure, and he is dissatisfied, and thinks the pulpit false to its trust, — perhaps pronounces it cowardly, if it do not from Sunday to Sunday, year in and year out, make that its great, absorbing theme. In regard to the introduction of topics of the kind referred to, I know of but one rule to be given, and that is, the occupant of the pulpit must act conscientiously, according to the best light he has or can obtain. He cannot be dictated to; he cannot surrender his independence; yet he may be expected to avoid rashness, one-sidedness, and extravagance, remembering that the Gospel is not a spirit of “power” merely, but also of “wisdom and a sound mind,” and he is to discern things that differ. He will not assume a defiant tone; nor say provoking things simply to show his daring. He will speak the truth in love, not in temper, passion, or wrath. There are proprieties of the pulpit, a calm dignity, a tenderness and delicacy, a respect for common rights and feelings, which he will not deem it a part of Christian fidelity to discard. After all, more depends on manner, language, and tone, than on matter and thought. It is not so much what is said that irritates, as how it is said. There are few, if any, topics on which the occupant of the pulpit may not freely speak, if he observe due modesty, and do not lose his temper; if he allow others their rights; if he do not dogmatize, adopt an arrogant, overbearing tone, nor resort to abusive epithets or bitter sarcasm, — always out of place in the pulpit. Few congregations will feel any desire to limit his freedom, or control his independence, as long as he makes it evident that the meek, loving spirit of the Saviour rests upon him, and breathes in all his thoughts, words, and acts. His people will encourage and wish him to use this freedom; and will cease to respect him if he do not. I doubt whether there is any disposition in any large number to restrain the reasonable exercise of liberty in the pulpit. The pulpit is not impeccable; and if there is fault, it may be sometimes there, — not always in the pews.

I say, then, in conclusion of this part of my charge, — in select-

ing topics of discourse, and in treating them, use your own judgment ; act independently, but always in a spirit of Christian kindness, and with due consideration of others' rights and feelings, avoiding needless offence. Be honest, be candid, be upright ; utter your own sentiments with frankness, not timidly, but in " meekness of wisdom " ; and from what I know of this people, I can assure you of their love and respect, and a disposition to allow you all the freedom you can desire.

The pulpit has great duties to perform, disconnected with the exciting topics of the day. Counsel, reproof, encouragement, consolation, — the preaching of Christ, the unfolding of the great, spiritual truths of his Gospel, and their application to conscience, — the momentous retribution of sin and holiness, — repentance, forgiveness, death, judgment, — here are exhaustless themes, no one of which is to be neglected, but each one is to be treated with a frequency and earnestness proportioned to its importance. So Christian faithfulness demands.

I have left myself time but barely to allude to pastoral duties. During the ministry of your predecessor they were discharged in this place with great fidelity, and you will be expected not to neglect them. Visit, encourage, and console. Let your counsels and prayers in the house of mourning, and by the bedside of the dying, be felt to be a blessing. Neglect no legitimate mode of influence. Give special attention to the young. You can benefit them as you cannot benefit others whose characters are fixed and stereotyped. Be in the midst of them, and, if you can, acquire their confidence, their love ; and lead them to Jesus, that through him they may be led up to the Father, and they shall be your joy and crown in the great day of account.

Be not easily discouraged ; but proceed on your way with a strong and resolute heart, and leave the result to Providence. And may the God of all power and might, all wisdom and love, go with you, my brother, enlighten you by his spirit, guide you in perplexity, sustain you in your trials, and crown your ministry with his blessing.

RIGHT HAND OF FELLOWSHIP.

MY FRIEND AND BROTHER, — Institutions, as you are aware, sometimes outlast their day, and outlive their meaning. Many forms which at first had a right to be, because they had a soul in them, lose the soul, but do not go out of sight as forms till long after their spirit has fled.

A form comes into use at first as the expression of a thought, — the embodiment of some idea. But the thought expands to something better, or shrinks to something poorer; and still the form often lives on its formal life, in shape, and size, and external seeming, unchanged. No, it cannot be said to live on, — it is embalmed rather, and preserved as a dead form. And it is usually difficult to get rid of a dead form, and bury it, when men have done with it. The tendency is to keep it after life has gone out of it, rather than to lay it by while life remains in it. To drop any form which we have been accustomed to, is to confess that its life has departed, and nobody, perhaps, likes to be the one to take the responsibility of making that confession. When the spirit declines and dies away from any form, it is a change which goes on so gradually and secretly, that it does not excite observation. But it is a change which all remark when the form itself is taken down from its usual place, and put away from sight. For the most part, men like to believe as long as they can, that the spirit is not gone from any time-honored and cherished form, or that, if gone, it will come back again; and so they keep the house, that the tenant may find it again when he wants it. They continue to repeat the good word which has long been in use, and which once had a meaning, that it may be ready for a meaning to inhabit again, should there fortunately come a meaning by and by to fit it, and claim it.

You do not see whereto all this tends, my friend? Perhaps it tends no whither. Perhaps it makes no proper part of these services. The way it came in was this. When I found myself nominated to offer you the "Fellowship of the Churches" on the occasion of your ordination, I asked myself, as I think was not unnatural, whether I could offer you that; whether anybody could; whether fellowship was a thing that one could give or promise to another. I could see well enough how the *sign* of fellowship might be introduced here. I could see how we — these ministers here, and delegates from the churches — could agree to act as if we had fellowship with you; that we might promise to conduct towards you, exteriorly, as fellow-Christians should conduct towards one another; that we might mutually pledge ourselves to the interchange of ministerial courtesies and Christian offices. But the essence of fellowship is not in an act, or in any series of acts. Outside behavior cannot include it. It will reside in no arrangement which we of this council, on the one part, and you, on the other, may consent to enter into. It was not singular, then, that one who was to meet you to-day with the assurance of the "fellowship of the churches," should ask himself what he would mean, when he should come to this office, — when he should rise to tell you that you had such fellowship, and should hold out the hand of welcome. He inquired of himself, What would the sign signify? A welcome to what? And the inquiry compelled him to see that this rite, this giving the hand of fellowship, is one of those forms which has lost in great measure its original significance. You will mind that I do not say a rite which has lost significance, but one which has lost the peculiar significance which it had at first.

The fellowship of the churches is, with us, pretty much a thing of the past. The independence of the churches has been carried to such an extreme, that it has come to be little short of the isolation of the churches. Nor is this surprising, when individualism has been carried so far within each fold, that fellowship sometimes exists only in name, even among those persons who constitute one church. The time was, and not far back, when the independency of the Congregational churches of New England did not prevent their being banded together in close relationship. If this fellow-

ship consisted something too much in external forms, it was real of its kind ; it did not profess to make little account of the external ; it expressed what it was meant to ; as a form, it was kept up with a spirit and vigor which proved that, to those who employed it, it was not altogether formal. When no church settled or unsettled a minister without calling in advisers from the neighboring churches ; when every dissension arising within a church led to the summoning of numerous counsellors from among the pastors and brethren of the churches round about to hear and advise the matter ; when every drought and flood, every fire and epidemic, every extraordinary calamity and unaccountable phenomenon in nature, were made the occasion of local fasts, in the improvement of which several of the nearest pastors were expected to lend their assistance, by taking part in the appointed solemnities ; when, often, a church without a pastor elected the pastor of some bordering church to be its presiding officer, and to aid in all its deliberations and acts, — then it meant something, when an accredited member of an ordaining council stood up before an anxious and inexperienced young man, just assuming a pastoral charge, and pledged to him the support, confidence, and sympathy of his ministering brethren around, and of the churches of his vicinity. Though Congregationalism vindicated the right of every church to choose and ordain its own teacher in its own way, it was practically found by the candidate as necessary that he should be accepted and approved by the Church general, as by that particular church to which he was specially to minister. Until he was passed upon and recognized by the great body of Christians as sound in doctrine and well furnished for his ministry, his own flock might hold it an unsettled question whether he were wolf to be dreaded, or shepherd to be followed.

But though circumstances are somewhat changed with us, my brother, and our ecclesiastical forms and organizations seem to indicate less denominational coherence and less co-operation and interaction among our religious bodies and among individual Christians than once were known, it is far from certain that there is any less true fellowship. Never was this rite, representative of Christian fellowship, more appropriate than now. Fellowship is not in modes of intercourse. It is not something which we will to

have, and therefore have it. The will cannot enact it. One cannot promise another that he will have fellowship with him. It depends upon whether he can. The *two* cannot decide that it shall be between them, and thereupon a real fellowship springs up according to their plan. It depends upon whether the conditions, on which alone it can be, are found in them. I can give no pledge that, for the future, there shall be fellowship between you and these ministers and their churches. It may not be possible. But I can remind you, — (and that is what I am here for, — nothing else, — and indeed there is great encouragement and cheer for you in that,) — I can remind you that you *do* have fellowship, and necessarily must, with all between whom and you there is unity of purpose and motive, affection and meaning. So far as moral and spiritual affinities lay a foundation for it, or make it possible, it is, it must be. We cannot arrange a fellowship, but we can declare that it is already just so far as there is a common life and love and worship, and loyalty for it to grow out of; and except as there is such a basis for it, we must declare it to be wanting, notwithstanding any show of it there may be. You and I may grasp hands here, but there is not necessarily any fellowship in that. We may not have a single fellow-feeling to bridge the space between our minds and souls, and, so long as we have not that, the clasped hands are nothing. Our souls will never flow together through our arms and joined hands. There must be concurrent affections, assimilated spiritual moods, coincident religious experiences, community of moral aim and purpose, to enable us to go over, the one to the other, to pass and repass the interval which separates our individualities. A gulf as wide, as impassable, as that which kept Lazarus and Dives asunder, may divide any two who stand hand in hand. To agree that once a twelvemonth we will exchange pulpit services, would not imply Christian fellowship between us. You may preach one Gospel, I another. That which I preach, you may be ashamed of. Him whom you confess, I may deny. You may be of one spirit, I of another, and between the two may be no possible communion.

On the other hand, no distance, no vote of exclusion, no want of acquaintance, no inequality of station or difference of tongue, can prevent or terminate fellowship among such as are filled with

fellow-feelings, prompted by fellow-motives, lifted up by fellow-aspirations, anchored upon fellow-hopes, and consecrated to fellow-labors. In true Christian fellowship there is a oneness of innermost motive, a correspondence of lowermost convictions, a unanimity in the choice of ultimate ends of life, a blending of the central loves, a consentaneous flow and movement of that life which is liveliest within. There is a *felt assurance of kinship* in the hidden man of the heart. This is true fellowship; and there can be few hours in your life, my dear sir, when the thought of this communion of all saints could come to you more timely, more gratefully, more cheeringly, than in this hour. Your hand already touches your work. You begin to feel that there is to be no turning back, at the same time that you feel as you never did before the greatness of the charge you are undertaking. It would not be strange if you had experienced some solicitude and misgiving as to your sufficiency for these things before you. To any feeling of self-distrust that may be in you, I may not address a word calculated to make you think that the importance of the work of the ministry, or even the discouragements you will encounter in it, have been exaggerated. I think you will find the labors of your profession fully as great and as difficult, its trials as many and as hard, your discouragements as disheartening, as you now apprehend. The trying passages of your way probably will not be the very ones you now anticipate, but there will be others which you do not anticipate; and I have nothing to say by way of reducing your estimate of the toils and trials that are before you. But what then? You have looked all this in the face; and knowing who is your Helper, you are resolved to proceed. And now, although it will never do to match the workman with his work by bringing the work down to him, we may do it, if we can, by raising him to the measure of its demands. There is no work for you here, — for me elsewhere, — for any man anywhere, — for which he is not, through the almightiness of the Almighty, sufficient. The Christian theory is, that there are no impossibilities of a moral nature to the true disciple of Christ. I would spend no time in convincing a minister that he has not mountains to remove. I think he has that to do. But I may remind him out of the Gospel, that mountains are removable, when Christian faith essays to pluck

them away. And what more encouraging word can be said to one standing, as you do, at the door of this ministry, than to bid him remember in what fellowship he will work and bear? Whatever he does, he is sure of the fellowship of all who do the like ; whatever he is, he is sure of the fellowship of all who are like. And you, my brother, can go forth to no work of love, can lift no cross of self-denial, can pray no prayer of faith, can struggle no struggle with the flesh and the Devil, but you may have strength from the thought that you are in fellowship with all such as have wrought, and prayed, and denied themselves in like manner. You will remember that all who are one-minded and one-hearted constitute an indissoluble communion, — a communion of saints, if they are saintly-minded and saintly-hearted. You will feel an inspiration of hope and strength from the thought of the company to which you belong. Better than that. Be about your Father's business, and evermore shall you be able, with an infinite joy, to use the Apostle's words, "TRULY OUR FELLOWSHIP IS WITH THE FATHER, AND WITH HIS SON JESUS CHRIST."

I offer you, then, — and I do it with all my heart, — this token of the communion and fellowship which make one all Christian disciples.

ADDRESS TO THE SOCIETY.

BY REV. F. D. HUNTINGTON.

I SUPPOSE that the best possible "Address to the Society," at an Ordination, would be the most earnest exhortation to repentance and newness of spiritual life; inasmuch as the best parish will always be a parish of the best people. There is one condition of your future prosperity comprehensive enough to include all others,—faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. For if your devotion to him is real, and warm, and constant, it will expel all causes of disorder from your spiritual body; it will create internal health; it will make mutual dissensions among the members impossible; it will turn weakness itself into strength, dissatisfaction into content, and, in the "foolishness of men" and preaching, illustrate the "wisdom of God." Perhaps there could be no surer test of a Society, than a capacity to exist, and hold its own, independently of sermons,—having, for its organizing and vitalizing force, a secret fellowship with the Head of the Church, and a love of God's worship.

But it is commonly expected of this part of the ordaining ceremonies, that, in its direct specifications of duty, it shall balance the Charge to the minister. And as that is meant to open upon him certain claims on the part of the people, which they would hardly feel at liberty to express to him in their own persons, so this brings to the notice of the people some obligations due from them, which he might not feel it quite delicate to challenge for himself. Under this construction, considerable plainness would seem to be a natural prerogative of both performances, and not needing apology. I accept this freedom the more cheerfully, because I have reason to know the parish I am addressing to be full of right pur-

poses and an honest zeal for joining their new minister in every pure and legitimate enterprise for the Gospel.

You have, once more, my friends, a messenger of the New Testament, elected by your affections and your judgment. The place providentially made vacant, Providence has permitted to be filled. I earnestly congratulate you both on the consolations and the promises that are gathered into this hour, and uttered in this service. I am sure of your hearty assent, when I say that I could offer you no more impressive exposition of your duties, than by calling up the image of that venerable and apostolic man, whose whole life and conversation among you, for so many years, were a tender and wise teaching of whatever pertains to the relations between a good shepherd and his flock.

In the ardor of your affection for your newly acquired minister, you are doubtless anxious to give proofs of your attachment to him. Understand, once for all, that no visible token of it can be so satisfying to him as for you to be in the pews while he, or his substitute, is in the pulpit. It will be worth incalculably more to him, for the refreshing of his fatigues and the cheering of his spirit, than any smooth or ingenious compliments. He will spare your flatteries, if you will let him see that you are not to be frightened from his instructions by a cloud in the sky or a snow-drift in the street. Strictly speaking, you are all making public proclamation here to-day that social worship deserves a regular attendance, every Sabbath, and both halves of it; and, by common honesty, if you have come together this afternoon, intending to let small occasions prevent your thus coming regularly hereafter, you are guilty of getting a minister on false pretences.

But there is a hearing heart, as well as a hearing ear. If you go to church to act the critic on the sermon on Sunday, the sermon will hardly help you to act the Christian through the week. It is better to be believers than critics.

On the other hand, while you offer to your minister a teachable spirit, that he may fairly achieve his own work upon you, be careful not to slide into the fatal misconception that he is to take your work out of your hands. We have dropped the theory of vicarious righteousness, and we cannot fall back upon any substitution of official piety. Luther describes a picture representing a ship

called the Christian Church, wherein the only passengers were the Pope and the clergy; the laymen were all in the water, dependent altogether on ropes thrown out to them by the holy fathers. Hierarchies are dead, past resuscitation. But the form of clerical usurpation which the Church has now to fear is that which comes of the voluntary abandonment of their spiritual functions by the laity, leaving the whole labor of maintaining piety in the community to the minister, who is paid a salary for the job. Some parishioners seem to fancy that, if they show civilities to the clergyman, it will somehow so pass to their account, that Heaven will send comforts to them. The man you are ordaining has not come here to stand as a daysman between you and God, but to tell you truths, and to live a life, that shall awaken your own energies to action, to growth unlimited. You enter, with him, afresh upon a study of religion; and, at the Judgment, his presence will prove not to have shifted burdens of responsibility from your shoulders to his, but to have intensified every solemn stress upon your frame unspeakably.

It is largely the fashion to discuss preaching and preachers. Parlors, shops, markets, rail-cars, all have their comment on the sermon. When you talk of the discourse, talk of its matter, and not of its merits as a performance; of the spiritualities the pulpit inculcates, and not of the petty accidents that foster its secular ambition, and ornament or disfigure its incumbent.

Need I remind you to respect your minister's independence? I might rather join my wonder to yours, that self-respecting persons can ever consent to sit under a chained pulpit and a fettered preacher. It is often said there are parishes in New England that will not allow their ministers to speak what they believe, — thus keeping them literally *their* ministers and not Christ's. You will not be willing to have it understood, I think, that in West Dedham is a preacher whose conscience is under mortgage, — and that you are his people. You would rather have your opinions frankly contradicted, and your feelings kindly wounded, and your politics considerably crossed, every week, than to take any part in erecting a new moral inquisition, or procuring a test-act for making cowards and slaves of the successors of the Apostles. Imagine Paul and Peter taking cautious and expedient counsel together

whether their sentiments on righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, will suit their congregations ! Reject your minister the moment you find him accommodating his deliberate convictions to the popular demand, but not when he utters careful and good-tempered, but unwelcome words ; for in the latter case he may hold mistakes in his judgment, but in the former he carries a lie in his heart. And do not expect him always to wait, before he smites a sin, till it is manifestly dying of itself. That would make the church a prison of thought, the meeting-house a spiritual lazaretto, and your minister himself a piece of movable church furniture, scarcely worth the storage. Ye are called unto liberty, be not entangled again with any yoke of bondage.

In your houses, and in his, do not forget that Mr. Locke is a man, with a man's heart in his bosom, and a student, with a student's tastes, as well as a public speaker and pastor. There is such a thing as a cruel politeness, and an oppressive etiquette. If he should sometimes prefer to stay at home with his authors and his family, that he may the better strengthen and qualify himself for his office, have the magnanimity to let him be still. Without considerate allowances, there can be no right dealing between you and him ; without thoughtful delicacy, no progress in friendship ; and without lofty candor, no intercourse that is cordial, manly, or profitable.

Let me mention two or three of the elements that do *not* seem to me desirable in a parish, either for the sake of its own internal interests, or for its minister's encouragement and efficiency.

Have among you as few as possible of those men who regard religion as something to be done for the family by the female part of it. I know of some husbands who are able to designate their ecclesiastical relations only by mentioning what church their *wives* belong to ; as if piety were worthy of no other than feminine confidence. It is greatly to our shame that the actual available force of the most vital, most essential, and most commanding institution in our Christendom, — that for which all others do really exist, from which all others take their security and dignity, and the nearest, in its shaping, to the heavenly pattern of society, — the Christian Church, — should show such a constant disproportion between its male and female elements. The Church of the living God wants

the strong shoulders, the masculine energy, and the honest enterprise of men. Nor will the conjugal bond be found, at last, to include any vicarious virtue by which a church-going wife's religion saves her absenting husband's soul.

Have among you, again, as few as possible of those men or women whose only rule of church-going seems to be drawn from some rare and solemn occurrence at their houses ; as that they shall appear at God's worship one Sunday after a pastoral call, and two or three after a bereavement and a funeral, and then fall back into a normal state of neglect. A congregation dependent on these fitful stimulants to attendance follows the grave-yard's law of population in more ways than the one I have mentioned.

Have among you, again, as few as possible of those turbulent spirits, — the thorns and bramble-bushes of the Christian vineyard, — whose only function is to goad and vex the rest ; who thrive on parish dissensions ; men who snuff incipient provocations, as Job's war-horse snuffeth the battle, or Jeremiah's wild asses the wind, afar off ; men who find no more wholesome exercise of their influence than by breeding contentions between the pews, or painful suspicions in the pulpit ; men who are ready to go to any meeting of the parish rather than the one that is held on Sunday, and, when there, only agitate the materials of strife ; or women, who will be active in the charities of the congregation only out of a headstrong will, and would rather turn the social kindness of a whole sewing-circle into gall, than have good done to Christ's poor in any way but their own.

And since, in a community and a day like ours, things are apt to be tested by a pecuniary valuation, and since the willingness to give money may be taken as a tolerably fair thermometer of ecclesiastical zeal, so it will not be strange, if, in the livelier interest created by this new chapter in your affairs, you will find it impossible to deny yourselves the privilege of some fresh outlay on your church accommodations. So that we who love you and desire your good shall be neither surprised nor sorry to hear that presently, having made liberal provision for your pastor, you have given a more convenient form to your meeting-house, and provided that indispensable auxiliary to a thorough and enterprising parish, a good vestry. By this means you will not only encourage your

minister, but you will put a new power of benefiting you into his hands, and make the wisest of all investments for yourselves and your children.

Another class that you will be rich in proportion as you miss is composed of those whose increasing prosperity in business engenders an increasing indifference to all religious institutions and services; whose growing means are at once indicated and desecrated by growing worldliness, as if their honor could afford to forget the God that has prospered them, by less interested attention to the worship, by resigning their places as Sunday-school teachers, on some poor plea of having served long enough, or finding small fruits, and by a diminished heartiness, or else a lighter tone, in their intercourse with their spiritual guide. I have no doubt the minister we are ordaining over you will be just as faithful in all his official and personal attentions to these sad instances of spiritual declension, as to any other members of his flock; he will come and sorrow with them in their sorrows, he will pray for them with double earnestness in his study, he will count no sacrifices hard to serve and help them; but it is for them to consider with how heavy a heart he will do it, how painfully their changed faces will affect him, and how wrongfully the pledges of this hour of mutual promises will be broken.

A parish situated as this is has at least this advantage over our city congregations, that the minister is not disheartened by seeing his parishioners on Sunday driving into the country. Let us hope that, if your city friends should call at any of your houses in church time, they will be rebuked by finding none of the family at home.

You desire parish success and increasing numbers. But accessions from either of the classes I have mentioned would be worse for you than empty seats.

You desire parish success, I say, and increasing numbers. If you will give your minister freedom, give him time, give him your ears and hearts, and form yourselves about him into a consecrated phalanx, however small, of devout, working, harmonious parishioners, thoroughly baptized into his own spirit and the spirit of Jesus his master, you will find that his gifts will surely draw to his ministration enough of the only material of which strong societies are built. Be content to take the truth your minister brings to

you, to enjoy his labors and friendship, to tax yourselves liberally, and then bide God's time. Abstain altogether from the poor practice of counting your minister's hearers when you ought to be digesting his doctrine.

All these are but subordinate and minute particulars. Such duties of detail are sure to fall into place, whenever the soul is quickened by the devotions and the sympathies of a living faith. The grand business of a Christian parish is to ordain and edify within its body a true church life. By a zealous carefulness for things invisible and eternal which shall more than match your busy industry and your active enterprise, — by brotherly and sisterly helpfulness between the members, — by the righteousness that transcends barren rules of decency, — by principles deeper than professions, — by a piety that is greater than morality, — by a faith that inspires works, — and by prayers that at once lift earth into the light of heaven and bring down the glory of heaven to earth, — you are to build yourselves up, a living temple in the Lord, on the foundation of prophets and apostles, “Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.”

You have appointed, and witnessed, and confirmed, the ordination of your minister. This is the ordination vow which is laid upon you.

ORDER OF SERVICES.

1. Voluntary Anthem.
2. Prayer. By Rev. Mr. Sanger, of Dover.
3. Reading of Scripture. By Rev. J. M. Merrick, of Walpole.
4. Hymn. By Mrs. S. F. Clapp.

God of all churches here below !
With needed blessing now draw near,
And let thy holy spirit flow,
Filling our souls with love and fear ; —

Love for the truth thy Son has taught,
And fear to break thy just command ;
Love, working righteous deed and thought, —
Fear, keeping watch o'er heart and hand !

O bless thy servant, who to-day
Apostle's armor putteth on ;
Gird him with strength and purity,
With zeal and truth to preach thy Son !

And make all hearts more fervent, Lord !
Renew our love for righteousness !
Grant open ears to hear thy word,
And answering lives of holiness !

From devious paths preserve our feet !
Lead us, in love, by " waters still " !
O give us " living bread " to eat,
Through faithful doing of thy will !

5. Sermon. By Rev. Mr. Stearns, of Hingham.

6. Hymn. By Mrs. M. L. B.

God, who dost dwell alone, apart,
 In thine eternity sublime,
 Yet visitest the human heart,
 And dwellest with the sons of time ;—

Most Holy, do not thou refuse
 To meet below with us to-day ;
 Blest is the man whom thou dost choose
 For ever in thy courts to stay.

Come, and thy servant shall be blest,
 Who tremblingly himself doth gird,
 Putting thy shield upon his breast,
 Taking the strong sword of thy Word.

Come, and anoint, and consecrate,
 Lay thine own hand upon his head ;
 So shall he cheer the desolate,
 And for the hungry break thy bread.

7. Prayer of Ordination. By Rev. J. H. Morison, of Milton.

8. Charge. By Rev. Dr. Lamson, of Dedham.

9. Fellowship of the Churches. By Rev. Mr. Willson, of West Roxbury.

10. Address to the People. By Rev. Mr. Huntington, of Boston.

11. Hymn.

12. Benediction.

